INTENDED AND REALIZED FERTILITY: A LIFE COURSE APPROACH

Maria Rita Testa

Long abstract prepared for the European Population Conference 2016

Abstract

Adults' intentions to have children compete with intentions in different fields of life. Studying how individuals construct their preferences among competing life goals and build intended family trajectories is a challenging task and pertains to an under-investigated area of research. In this analysis, we examine for the first time the correspondence between fertility intentions and reproductive outcomes over the individuals' life course using event history techniques and taking into account the 'interdependencies of parallel careers' (Dykstra and van Wissen 1999). The focus is on the following careers: childbearing, union, education, employment and migration. The theoretical background draws on the sociological theory of life course (Edler 1985). The life course approach emphasizes the salience of the historical and social context for the interaction of related careers (Mayer 2004). Hence, we propose a cross-country comparative longitudinal approach. The analysis uses the follow-up surveys of the GGS data for nine European countries including Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Austria, Estonia, Belgium, Lithuania and Poland. Piecewise regression models with interaction effects between reproductive intentions and intentions/events competing with childbearing are used. The outcome variable is the waiting time to the birth of a first or higher birth order child, as the models are stratified by parity, i.e., childless and parents. The key covariate is the intentions to have a child in the next three years. Preliminary results show that: 1) people form their intentions to have a(nother) child in a context of multiple *life aims* and childbearing competes with many other *life goals*; 2) all but resumption of study *intentions* support the realization of childbearing intentions; 3) *Realization* of intentions in parallel life domains support the realization of childbearing intentions but delay the birth of a child; 4) *Life course approach* is the appropriate framework to analyse the match between fertility intentions and outcomes.

Preliminary results

Fertility intentions are a strong predictor of fertility behavior (Table 1).

Events on one career can hinder, enable, delay or enhance events in others. Our preliminary analysis suggests that all but resumption of study intentions support the realization of fertility intentions. Moreover, the achievements of intentions in parallel life domains, such as: changing work, completing the study and entering a partnership are supportive of positive childbearing outcomes (Table 2).

Table 1 -- Estimates for having a(nother) child by childbearing intentions.

Stratified models:	Childbearing intentions	MODEL I		MODEL II		Sample
Parity **zero**	To have a first child	2.346	***	0.856	***	11,117
Parity **one**	To have a second child	3.260	***	1.161	***	5,948
Parity **two**	To have a third child	4.669	***	1.476	***	13,596

Model I includes only short term childbearing intentions
Model II include short term childbearing intentions and competing intentions
Both models are controlled for background variables, as at the time of the first GGS wave: age, age squared, gender, education, partner's education, employment, partner's employment.

Table 2 -- Estimates for having a(nother) child by childbearing and competing intentions and realizations.

Competing intentions	Hazard rate		Realizations of competing intentions	Hazard rate	
To have a child	1.24	***			
To get married	0.13	*	Enter partnership	0.81	***
To enter a union	0.04				
To complete study	0.36	*	Complete study	0.43	***
To resume study	-0.35	***			
To change work	0.30	***	Change work	0.20	***
To start working	0.27	***			
To move	0.37	***	Move	-0.07	

Model controlled for background variables, as at the time of the first GGS wave: age, age squared, gender, education, partner's education, employment, partner's employment.

All the interaction terms between intentions to have a(nother) child and competing intentions have a negative sign, with the only exception of resumption of study. The interactions with getting married, entering a union, starting to work and move to another place, are statistically significant. This finding suggests that although supportive of childbearing events the intentions in parallel life careers are delaying the birth of a child (i.e., they attenuate the positive effect of competing intentions on childbearing) (Table 3).

Table 3 -- Estimates for having a(nother) child by childbearing and competing intentions. Interactive model with all possible interactions between intention to have a(nother) child, on one side, and competing intentions, on the other side.

Competing intentions	Hazard rate		Interactions between child and competing intentions	Hazard rate	
To have a child	1.34	***			
To get married	0.57	***	Get married * child	-0.55	***
To enter a union	0.43	***	Enter union * child	-0.54	***
To resume study	-0.55	***	Resume study * child	0.27	
To change work	0.39	***	Change work * child	-0.14	
To start working	0.57	***	Start work * child	-0.34	***
To move	0.52	***	Move * child	-0.23	**

Model controlled for background variables, as at the time of the first GGS wave: age, age squared, gender, education, partner's education, employment, partner's employment.

We conclude that on one hand, multiple roles that adults face can be an obstacle to the fulfilment of reproductive intentions (Thomson and Brandreth 1995). On the other hand, events like, for example, entering a partnership can support both the formation of childbearing intentions and the subsequent realization (Philipov 2009). Choices are constrained by opportunity structure, social institutions and culture which advocates for a comparative level of analysis. The cross-country comparative results still need to be elaborated and will be provided at the time of the conference.

Basic references

Elder, G. H. 1985. Perspectives on the life course. In Elder, G. H. (ed) *Life course dynamics: trajectories and transitions, 1968-1980*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, pp.23-49.

Elder, G. H., M. Johnson and R. Crosnoe 2003. The emergence and development of life course theory. In: Mortimer, J.T., and M. J. Shanahan (eds.) *Handbook of the life course*. New York: Kluwer Academic, pp. 3-19.

Mayer, K.U. 2004. Whose lives? How history, societies, and institutions define and shape life courses. *Research in Human Development* 1, 161-187.

Philipov, D. 2009. Fertility intentions and outcomes. The role of policies to close the gap. *European Journal of Population*, 25(4):355-361.

Thomson, E, and Y. Brandreth 1995. Measuring fertility demand. *Demography*. 34:343-354.